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### **PSC APPROVES HOT SPRINGS TELEPHONE COMPANY'S EXPANDED LOCAL CALLING PROPOSAL**

The state Public Service Commission on Tuesday approved the proposal of Hot Springs Telephone Company for extended area telephone service between the Hot Springs Telephone exchange and Qwest's Missoula local calling region, including that region's proposed expansion to incorporate the Blackfoot Telephone Cooperative exchanges and the Ronan Telephone Company exchanges. Extended area service expands local calling areas so that customers' phone calls within an EAS area are local, not long-distance. However, local phone rates in an EAS area must increase to recover EAS costs.

The impact of the EAS approval will vary for each customer depending on his/her calling patterns. For some customers, the reduction in long-distance charges will offset the increase in local rates. For others, who make few long-distance calls within the expanded area, that will not be the case.

The expanded Missoula local calling region will consist of Qwest's exchanges in Missoula, Darby, Frenchtown, Hamilton, Stevensville, and Victor; Blackfoot's exchanges in Alberton, Alta, Arlee, Charlo, Clinton, Condon, Dixon, Drummond, Haugan, Noxon, Ovando, Philipsburg, Plains, Potomac, Seeley Lake, South Alberton, St. Ignatius, St. Regis, Superior, Thompson Falls, and Powell, Idaho; Ronan's exchanges in Ronan and Pablo, and the Hot Springs exchange. Hot Springs' residential customers will pay an extra \$10.50 per month for unlimited local calling and business customers will pay an additional \$15.50 per month. Hot Springs will offer measured local service options at a lower monthly rate to customers. Upon implementation, Qwest will increase its statewide monthly EAS surcharge by 1 cent, and Blackfoot will increase its statewide residential monthly EAS surcharge by 40 cents and by 70 cents for business customers.

According to PSC Chairman Bob Rowe, "After the local hearing, it became apparent that a ballot of customers, supervised by the Commission, was appropriate. Customers' ballots were mailed directly to the PSC. The percentage returned was high, and support for the EAS proposal was very strong. This direct customer input was critical to the Commission's decision."

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